

passed Interior Appropriations bills that do exactly the opposite—we have cut essential funding that has put our natural resources at risk as well as allowed policy decisions to hamper our ability to protect at-risk land, wilderness and wildlife. In previous years, I have stood before this Congress and expressed disappointment and anger with our complete disregard for environmental stewardship. But this year is different.

We finally have a bill that reflects where our budget priorities should be. While this legislation may not solve all of our problems, I believe it is an enormous step in the right direction.

First, I am proud to say that this bill allocates \$50 million for the stateside grant program of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Land and Water Conservation Fund was separated into two components—the full federal program and the stateside grant program—to help address overdevelopment in both urban and rural areas. The stateside program has increased the number of recreation areas and facilities in our communities. It has

also increased local involvement in land protection and open space preservation.

In New Jersey alone, the LWCF program has helped preserve of 73,000 acres of land by providing more than \$111 million in funding. Some of the funding has been used to cleanup playgrounds, and build baseball fields, develop waterfront parks and restore open spaces. It is beyond me why the President continues to propose eliminating a program that is so successful. Fortunately, Chairman DICKS and the members of the Subcommittee understand the vital role this program plays in protecting and maintaining vital open spaces. They have invested in a program that remains a staple for conservation and land protection across the country.

These funds are long-term gifts that allow for the preservation of the wild and untouched places in America that our children and their children should have for their enjoyment.

These funds provide for Tuesday night baseball games and Sunday walks along the river, along with keeping what remains of our natural resources clean and pollutant free.

I also want to commend the committee for recognizing the dire situation of the National Parks. In preparation for the 100th anniversary of the National Parks System in 2016, we have included a hefty increase in the Parks budget for this fiscal year. This will go to park improvements, staffing increases, and visitor center upgrades in the Parks. Nearly a hundred years ago, Theodore Roosevelt urged the American people and the government to begin to conserve what natural resources we had so that some of the most majestic parts of this country would remain intact. With the 100-year anniversary of the National Park Service drawing closer, I echo the call to bring our National Parks up to standards.

Again, I would like to commend Chairman DICKS for crafting this bill before us today and I urge my colleagues to support it. By starting here today with this bill, we are voting for our sons and daughters and our grandchildren to be able to enjoy the natural resources of our country that so many of us have had the opportunity to experience in our lifetimes.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Chairman, I submit the following for the RECORD.